Mary Elizabeth Berry
Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period

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Japan in Print is a provocative book, made all the more so with a clever introduction spread over two chapters. In the first, Berry asks us to adopt the persona of a late seventeenth-century Kyoto silk merchant about to embark on a trip to Edo. We follow his preparation as he consults a remarkable variety of publications including maps, atlases, encyclopedias, dictionaries, calendars, almanacs, rural gazetteers, urban directories, travel accounts, personnel rosters, biographical compendia, manuals of work, manuals of play, guides to shopping and local products, and school primers. The second chapter provides Berry with the opportunity to describe and characterize this vast and varied assemblage of reference works which she refers to as the library of public information. The library does not constitute an archive per se but was "a metaphorical place" where texts "fit together because of their common purpose: to examine and order the verifiable facts of contemporary experience for an open audience of consumers" (p. 15). While holdings in library are disparate in the subjects they cover, they are related in significant ways. Because they were commercially published for a highly entrepreneurial market, they overlap, repeat, and mimic each other as authors and publishers attempted to supersede their predecessors and one-up the competition. Claims to direct observation, aspirations to timeliness, a focus quotidian matters, and emphases on nomenclature and classification characterize the primary concerns of those who contributed their knowledge and talents to the library. The rationale for this book rests on this interconnectedness: "[T]he strongest link between the texts is attitude. And it is here that the merit of thinking about them collectively comes clear; for the information library discloses pervasive habits of mind" (p. 16). Reading examples from the information library against the background of state sponsored cadastral and cartographic surveys, sociopolitical structures, urbanization, travel, and the developments of commercial publishing and a reading public, Berry documents these *mentalités*, noting especially the emergence of a nascent sense of "nation"—a term not often associated with seventeenth-century Japan. In the chapters that follow, Berry walks us through the information library as she attempts to stretch reposition nationhood in the early Tokugawa era.

Berry compares examples from the information library with similar material from the medieval period to great effect throughout the book but especially in her discussion of maps in chapter three. Few pre Tokugawa maps survive (225 according to one census) whereas thousands of examples were in circulation by 1700 (p. 58). She characterizes medieval maps as localized and insular, not because of deficient cartographic skills, but rather that medieval mapmakers "confronted a landscape so fissured by local practice and knowledge that common denominators indispensable to cartography were difficult to stretch beyond a few square kilometers" (p. 76). This contrasts sharply with maps produced after 1600 when particularity disappeared in favor of more general classifications of space. Berry attributes this to late sixteenth- early seventeenth-century sociopolitical developments including civil wars in the Muromachi era that "broke familiar tenurial relations and the erased the tortured geography of medieval politics" (p. 78), deracination of warriors from the land, new forms of domainal management, an escalation from local to regional and eventually to national conflicts during the unification period, 280 domainal transfers in the first fifty years of the Tokugawa era, and the presence of foreign maps in Japan. Hideyoshi is accorded a prominent role in the development of early modern cartography because of the cadastral and cartographic surveys he initiated in 1591. He required that maps be focused on districts, a holdover from the Heian era, as opposed to villages (the basic unit of medieval maps) or daimyo domains, the borders of which were still being contested. District maps were, in turn, collated into provincial maps, another remnant of classical-era cartography. Berry argues that this return to imperial conceptions of space was consistent with Hideyoshi's political ambitions. He accrued the authority to rule by acquiring court titles. His efforts to rebuild Kyoto provide further evidence of his classical/imperial mindset. Berry demonstrates how the focus on districts and provinces deflected anxiety over domainal boundaries while facilitating nascent national sensibilities. The cumulative effect of these changes induced reconceptualization of locale, region and nation, with the later gradually taking on more significance in the seventeenth century as Tokugawa maps overlaid Hideyoshi's province-based cartography with symbols of national political authority such as castle

towns and the highway system that connected them.

But Berry cautions against ascribing causality to only sociopolitical factors. Citing the work of the cartographic historian P.D.A. Harvey who contends that mapmaking entails not only technical skills, but a specific way of thinking, she argues that "any mapmaker, in any situation, faces one basic challenge: to reduce space to generic attributes" (p. 60). Thus, for Berry the conceptual shift from the medieval to the early modern eras was ideological. It rests on the development of systems of spatial classification and the ability "to think generically about the space of the nation" (p. 60). This new way of thinking was passed on to the general public when the Tokugawa regime released its national maps to commercial publishers in the 1630s. Government prototypes were quickly revised to suit the market by adding (and sometimes illustrating) *meisho*, which suggested the existence of a common national culture.

Chapter four explores military and bureaucratic mirrors. Military mirrors, organized according to domain size, documented essential information about the daimyo including hereditary and personal names, court rank, domainal location and productivity. Heraldic regalia, in the form of crests and insignia, added a visual component necessitated by a need for urban dwellers to be able to recognize their superiors and peers. Officeholder mirrors listed official positions in the shogunal bureaucracy and were organized geographically (beginning with Edo and extending to the provinces) and hierarchically (in descending order of prestige). Commoners in service to the shogun appeared at the end of these lists. Berry's explication focuses on the essential differences between these two types of documentation. In an effort to reify Tokugawa authority, military mirrors fixated on hereditary bloodlines, often using extensive genealogies reaching back to the classical era. Officeholder mirrors present the shogunal administration as a meritocracy in which men of lower status were often appointed to positions of authority over those with higher rank. The former relegated political authority to an iconic realm while the latter made government appear accessible. Both contributed to the nascent sense of nation by exposing the structure and operating principles of the Tokugawa regime to public view.

Chapter five takes up the subject of urban compendia, multivolume surveys that explored cities and urban life in a comprehensive manner. Berry notes that their content and arrangement could vary substantially but "their coverage tends towards convergence, as if some combination of mimicry, inertia, and commonsense had produced an agreement about essential urban properties" (p. 143). She lists physical layout, history, hereditary honor (meaning imperial and shogunal authority), work (broadly defined to include scholars, connoisseurs, craftsmen, and merchants), shrines and temples, and ritual life as the organizational categories common to most urban surveys. Reader constituencies and subjectivities were constructed out of personal interest in one or many of the topics addressed in these compendia.

Urban surveys provided a utilitarian alternative to maps, one that facilitated navigation through words as opposed to the codes and abstractions of cartography. Cities were envisioned as systems of wards and streets. Wards demarcated a fundamental unit of social organization and self-governance, effectively defining a person's place in both the city and its social structure. Lists of major avenues, organized north to south then east to west provided another means of spatial orientation. The practice of narrating streets from one end to the other highlighted important institutional structures (shrines, temples, historic sites) while conveying the unique character of each ward abutting the main thoroughfares.

Relying on imperial and military genealogies, foundation tales (*engi*), academic studies of historical geography, and the legends, myths and folklore of *meisho*, urban surveys were layered with references to the past. "Historical recall saturates their texts, not as some pedantic labor but as an almost instinctive, and exhilarating, mode of orientation." Berry suggests that a populist tendency motivated authors "to project a shared urban space through a shared history" (p. 145). The effect was "kaleidoscopic" as "multiplying categories break metahistory into disparate parts freely available to the curious" (p. 149) and encourage possession of the city through knowledge, even for those with no material, ancestral or proprietary claim to its physical spaces.

Following the organizational protocols of mirrors, urban surveys also listed court aristocrats (in Kyoto examples), daimyo, appointees to the shogunal bureaucracy, and commoners employed the administration. But they depart radically from their prototypes by also listing specialists (in a variety of subjects such as tea, Confucian scholarship, sword connoisseurship, etc.), well-known artists, famous craftsmen, and prominent merchants. In effect, urban surveys combine mirrors with commercial directories. Berry sees this as a form of social leveling—a dissolution of class in favor of a self-legitimizing public realm of work that consigns aristocrats and martial lords to

"a remote domain of blood honor" (p. 169).

Urban surveys also facilitated access to the ritual life of cities with lists and brief descriptions of annual festivals, religious observances and secular commemorations. These lists were egalitarian in their treatment of sectarian differences, comprehensive in the manner in which they take in the entire city, and long—too long in fact for any individual to attend all the events. Berry notes that descriptions of ritual events tend to focus on their practice as opposed to their underlying beliefs, as if to invite participation and membership in the communities served by each observance.

Berry uses a guidebook and an all-purpose family encyclopedia in chapter six to explore audiences and cultural literacy. With prefaces purporting that these publications were "for ordinary people" or "for everyone," they suggested a community of readers undifferentiated by social status or occupation. Compared to mirrors and urban compendia, these publications tended to be compact. They assume, therefore, considerable knowledge on the part of their readers. Guidebooks spare no effort to communicate in the simplest possible terms. They use straightforward grammar and provide phonetic readings for *kanji*. Routes are organized spatially and descriptions of individual sites are entirely oriented toward the visual. But this effort to accommodate a wide constituency of readers also demands of them extensive foreknowledge on a varied array of topics. In Berry's estimation, "cultural custody of the landscape is exchanged for cultural literacy" (p. 194) and this exchange requires readers to take on the responsibility for knowing the shared history and cultural heritage of "our country" (*waga hi no moto*) (p. 195).

Family encyclopedias offered information commonly available in other texts but often repackaged it in an ad hoc manner. Possessing no overarching narrative and presenting no agenda, they were "depositor[ies] of facts, rich but random, for curious seekers of knowledge" (pp. 199-200). Like guidebooks they presume a readership familiar with and invested in broader conceptualizations of *Nihon* and *honchō*. On matters of geography, for example, encyclopedias followed standard provincial divisions but often included national totals for such things as the number of villages, shrines, temples, and fields under cultivation (pp. 200-201). National histories in encyclopedias utilized imperial and shogunal genealogies as organizational tropes but presented them in a way that exposed the ruptures, breaks, and upheavals official genealogies typically obfuscate. For Berry, encyclopedias make "succession an ongoing achievement of will, fraught with violence and negotiation, which enters into a national life … Succession emerges, in effect, as a continuing story of the "us" who constitute not just a target of genealogical edification but a party to consequential struggles" (p. 203).

In chapter seven, provocatively titled "Nation," Berry reiterates the major themes of the book from two new perspectives. Using Saikaku's 1688 The Eternal Storehouse of Japan (*Nihon eitaigura*), she notes how popular fiction utilized material and tropes from the library of public information. Like the sources on which it was often based, fiction also "presumes cultural literacy—a framework of references that orient readers in a recognizable and shared world" (p. 217). The eclectic nature of the knowledge presented in fiction, however, "posits mixed audiences … ready to comprehend experience across boundaries," forcing Berry to ask: "do these mixed audiences and crossed boundaries signify a nation" (pp. 217-218). Evidence suggests an affirmative response. Saikaku's omniscient gaze as narrator provides a vantage point from which to view the territorial integrity of Japan. Persistent references to "*Nihon*" in his writing enhance this effect. Linking the language and tropes of the information library through travel and an encyclopedic knowledge of regional products, the nation in Saikaku's fiction became "not just a commonly accessible mental ground but a practically intertwined space of exchange" (p. 222). As with readers of urban compendia, Saikaku's characters move through space and across class lines quickly and with such relative ease that social divisions recede and collectivity emerges. Saikaku also takes collective knowledge for granted, much like the authors of guidebooks. His humor assumed that readers were culturally literate enough to be in on the joke.

Berry's second perspective is perhaps more controversial but not as well argued. The library of public information challenges the commonly held notion that the shift from early modernity to modernity occurred in the Meiji era. She attempts to demonstrate this by drawing comparisons between the information library and Meiji ideological constructs concerning territory, state, culture, and public. While interesting, these comparisons are less useful that those made with the medieval era. History is always more convincing when narrated chronologically across immediately sequential periods. Berry's Meiji comparisons span a gap of 150 years spanning the genesis of the information library in the late seventeenth-century and the formation of the Meiji state in

the late eighteenth. Apart from a few illustrations, which she does not analyze and were, in any event, produced well after the seventeenth century, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ideological developments are not discussed in depth. As a result many of her observations seem somewhat anticlimactic. Some examples: Constructions of territorial integrity differed greatly because Tokugawa Nihon was self contained and virtually impenetrable to foreigners while Meiji Japan was defined through its intercourse with foreign nations. Whereas ideological construction of political authority in the Tokugawa era was directed mostly at a small peer group of daimyo as opposed to the general masses, Meiji political authority was outlined explicitly in the constitution and inculcated through the education system, military conscription, national taxation, and national holidays. Treatments of history in the information library were atomized, diffused, and voluntary—it was just one part of a multilayered experience of place and time. History in the Meiji period was unified around an imperial theme and made mandatory in schools. It was present in every aspect of being modern. Observations like these diminish what was up to this point an innovative concept coupled with a well-crafted historical analysis.

The cultural comparisons she explores, however, command more attention as they are more in keeping with what was argued in preceding chapters. The Tokugawa era possessed no regime-driven national identity like that in the Meiji period. Nonetheless, contributors to the information library projected a unifying discourse: "Staking out common ground that audiences could enter freely in mind or body, they appropriated both the human and physical terrain of Nihon as knowable, shared space. Describing the common ground in common tropes, they established the formal linkages that made the human and physical terrain intelligible as a whole" (pp. 242-43). Stressing that the information library was largely the product of commercial publishers and therefore driven to some extent by the market it served, Berry asserts that choice implies a public, one that was perhaps a predecessor to Meiji notions of public without the ideological rhetoric. She sums up her observations (and the book) with: "The profound change across the Meiji divide seems nonetheless to have been enabled by a prior public consciousness that had already overridden the status order with presumptions of a collective stake in Nihon. Without it, the tenacity of a society facing spectacular political crisis defies understanding" (p. 251).

Japan in Print has much to offer to a wide constituency of readers. Berry has made accessible an array of publications that heretofore have not received serious scholarly consideration. Her tangential discussions of everything from map theory to *meibutsu* are interesting and informative. Her methodology also deserves our admiration and emulation. Extracting habits of thought and mind from historical documents invariably presents scholars with a difficult task, particularly when the sources are so many and so rich but the audience remains, for the most part, undocumented. Berry rightly takes a cautious approach to this problem. She judiciously avoids over-reading the evidence while meticulously questioning her assumptions and observations in every argument she makes. As a result, the book's central proposition—stretching the "temporal dimension of nationhood" (p. 212) to the early Tokugawa era—is realized gradually and in small increments as we follow the author's path through her sources. We acquire a "sense of the nation" in much the same manner as seventeenth-century users of the library public information. The author's self-examination helps us retain our critical distance as the habits of thought and mind of her subjects become our own. Can we ask anything more from historical scholarship?